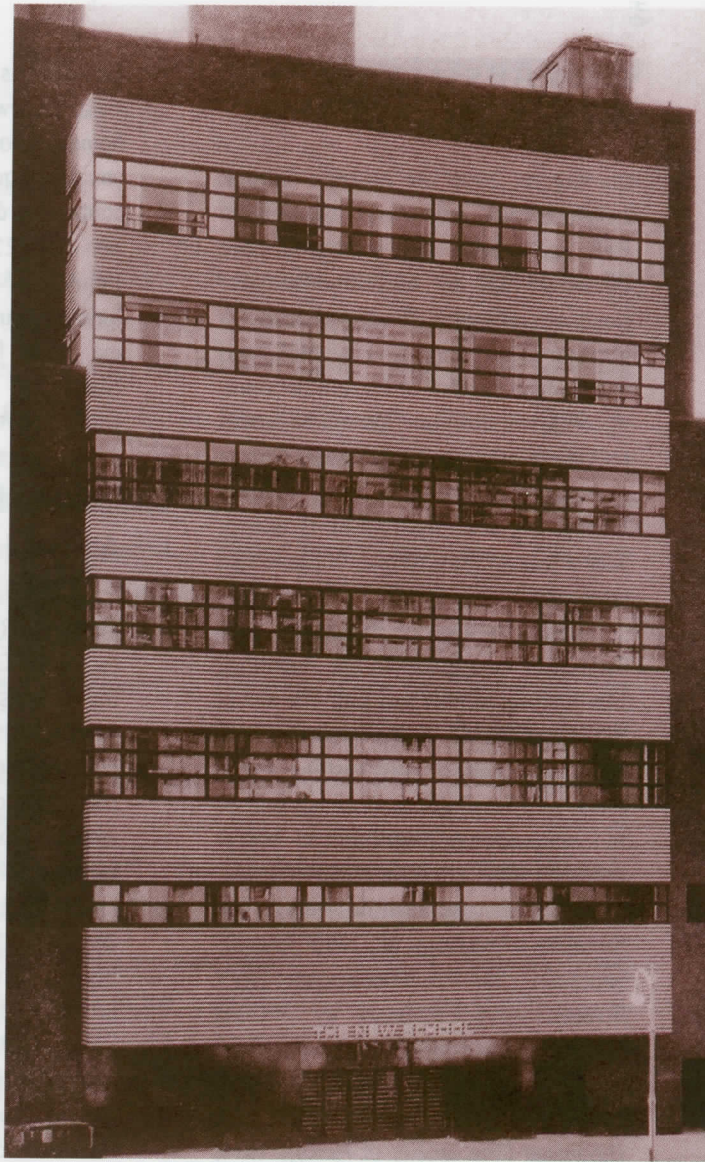


Austria Kultur

Visionaries in Exile

A new multimedia project breaks through the physical boundaries of museum settings and invites armchair travelers to take a cultural journey from Austria to America. The award-winning CD-ROM will be introduced at universities and museums around the States in a special presentation.



Lights, Camera... Action!

Sixpack Film launches short films, documentaries, and avant-garde productions for Austrian filmmakers.

Fin-de-Siècle Vienna in a Nutshell

An American historian is drawn to Austrian Modernism.

A Humane and Comfortable Modernism

Architect and designer Josef Frank espoused a bold new world of shape and form.

A Humane and Comfortable Modernism

A large-scale exhibition examines the contributions of an important but largely forgotten Austrian modernist architect and designer.

By Christopher Long

Although Josef Frank was one of the leading modern architects in Vienna and among Austria's most outstanding designers in this century, he remains much less celebrated than his slightly older contemporaries Josef Hoffmann and Adolf Loos. In the period after World War I, Frank played a central role in the development of the Moderne, and in later years, while in exile in Sweden, he became one of the founders of Swedish Modern design. But Frank's often outspoken criticisms of modern architecture and his idiosyncratic design philosophy kept him out of the modernist mainstream, and today he is largely unknown outside his native and adoptive countries.

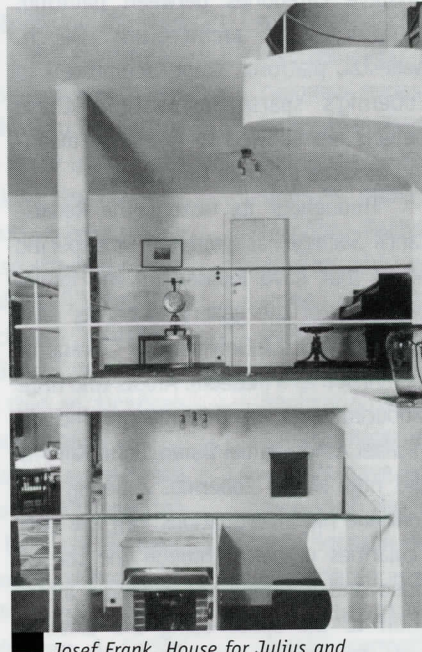
Frank's bold and unique work will be on view at an exhibition entitled *Josef Frank Architect and Designer: An Alternative Vision of the Modern Home* organized by the Bard Graduate Center for the Decorative Arts in New York from May 9 until July 21, 1996. Curated by Nina Stritzler-Levine with the assistance of Kristina Wängberg-Eriksson, Christian Witt-Dörning, and Christopher Long, the exhibition will feature more than 130 objects, including architectural drawings, models, drawings for applied arts, furniture, lighting, textiles, metalwork, and glass. Loans for the exhibition have been assembled from museums and archives in Austria, Sweden, and the United States as well as a number of private collections. Many of the drawings and decorative arts objects, including several rare early furniture pieces recently discovered in Switzerland, will be exhibited for the first time. The show will present the full range of Frank's output and will be the first exhibition to explore

Frank's architecture and design work in a cohesive display. It will begin with his formative years in Vienna from 1910 to 1933, and continue with an in-depth study of Frank's life and work in Sweden, where he moved to escape the rising tide of fascism. The exhibition will focus on Frank's unusual position within the modern movement and his unparalleled contributions to the creation of Swedish Modern design.

Josef Frank was born in Baden, Lower Austria, in 1885, the son of a prosperous Viennese Jewish textile manufacturer and wholesaler. He attended the k.k. Staatsoberrealschule (higher secondary school) in Vienna's first district, and from 1903 to 1910 studied architec-

ture at the Vienna Technische Hochschule (Polytech). During the years just prior to the outbreak of the First World War, he collaborated with Oskar Strnad and Oskar Wlach, specializing in residences and interiors for the city's haute bourgeoisie. After the war, Frank took up the cause of the burgeoning ranks of the homeless in Vienna, serving as an advisor to the city's many grass-roots housing cooperatives. During the 1920s and early 1930s, he also designed a number of large housing blocks for the Viennese municipal authorities, including the Wiedenhofer-Hof and a portion of the massive Winarsky-Hof.

In 1925, however, Frank returned to his first love, designing single-family homes and interiors, which he believed "provide(d) the best solution for the housing problem of our time." With Oskar Wlach, he opened Haus & Garten, a home furnishings business on Bösendorferstrasse that specialized in carefully-crafted objects for the well-to-do. The shop soon gained a reputation for its appealing and comfortable furniture and fabrics, and it became a leading competitor of the famed Wiener Werkstätte. During this period Frank also designed a series of innovative villas, but because of the precarious economic situation of the time most of these works remained unrealized. One of the few houses Frank was able to build, the remarkable villa for Julius and Margarete Beer on Wenzgasse in Hietzing, represents one of the most important modernist build-



Josef Frank, House for Julius and Margarete Beer, Vienna, 1929-1931, main hall from "Der Baumeister" 29 (1931)

ings constructed in Austria during the interwar years.

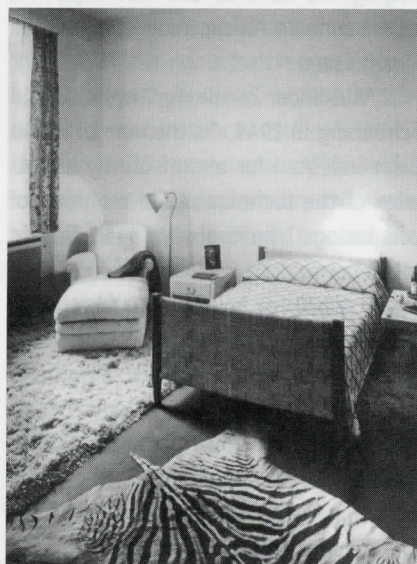
Despite his relatively small architectural output, Frank by the mid-1920s was widely recognized as one of the leading modernists in Europe. He was the only Austrian invited to design a house at the 1927 Weissenhofsiedlung overseen by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and he served as the Austrian representative at the inaugural meeting of the CIAM (International Congress of Modern Architecture) in 1928. Frank also played a leading role in the Austrian Werkbund, and he was responsible for the planning and organizing of the 1932 Vienna Werkbundsiedlung.

By the late 1920s, however, Frank had growing reservations about the direction the modern movement was taking. He was critical of those who exalted the machine, and he feared that the increasing attempts to codify modernism as a "style" would severely limit its possibilities. He was also deeply concerned by the increasing calls on the part of many within the avant-garde to abandon the historical tradition and begin completely anew. In his keynote address at the 1930 Werkbund Congress, Frank shocked many of those in attendance with an all-out assault on many of modernism's central tenets. Frank called instead for a design approach that would serve the everyday needs of his clients, one that would respond for their needs for comfort, convenience and satisfaction.

He summed up these ideas in his book *Architektur als Symbol: Elemente des deutschen neuen Bauens* (Architecture as Symbol: Elements of German Modern Architecture), which was published the following year. He chastised those who were more concerned with the appearance than the real substance of design, targeting in particular the tubular steel chairs popular with the German

avant-garde ("you can't even burn them," he once remarked). The inspiration for modernism, he argued, should come not from advances in technology, but from a careful study of the history and culture of everyday life. Although many at the time applauded Frank's comments as a necessary corrective for modernism's excesses, in the end his critical stance fixed his position as a modernist outsider.

In 1933, Frank left Austria with his Swedish wife and settled in Stockholm. There he emerged as one of the founders



Josef Frank, model bedroom Svenskt Tenn, 1934; Svenskt Tenn Archive, Stockholm

of Swedish Modern design and became the chief designer for Svenskt Tenn, a prominent Swedish retail design firm. From 1941 to 1946, Frank lived in New York City, where he lectured on his unique vision of modern architecture at the New School for Social Research. After the war he returned to Sweden and resumed his work as a designer for Svenskt Tenn. Late in his life, he issued a call for a radically new design approach, one based on the notion of chance ordering that Frank called "Accidentism." He designed a number of

these so-called "Accidental" houses intended as an antidote for what he perceived as the banality and sterility of International Style but they attracted scant attention at the time and none of the works was realized. Frank died in Stockholm in 1967. Many of his designs continue to be produced by Svenskt Tenn, but it has only been in recent years that his works and ideas have begun to be rediscovered elsewhere.

This exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue, the first English-language scholarly examination of Josef Frank's work. It will be published for the Bard Graduate Center by Yale University Press and consist of ten scholarly essays tracing the development of Frank's career and placing his work within a broader socio-political, cultural, and intellectual context; the catalogue will also include an extensive annotated and illustrated section. In addition, the Bard Graduate Center will present a variety of public programs relating to the exhibition, including family days, an open house for senior citizens, and a scholarly symposium. The symposium, which will feature renowned scholars of architecture and design from the US and Europe, will examine the contributions of Frank and other architects and designers of the time such as Adolf Loos, R.M. Schindler, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Eileen Gray, and Bruno Taut - who espoused "alternative settings." The symposium will serve as a forum for a discussion of Frank's work and its place within the modern movement.

For more information see the listing in the Calendar of Events section.

Christopher Long is a cultural and architectural historian. He has taught at the Central European University in Prague and at the University of Texas at Austin, and is currently completing a book-length study on Josef Frank.